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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationships between parent involvement practices and student outcomes in 10 Chapter 1 project schools in the Honolulu school district. The research on parent involvement was reviewed extensively to identify research questions and develop various instruments. Questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted with parents, students, and staff to assess participant perceptions. Stratified random sampling was used to obtain representative samples of project schools, parents, and students, and case studies were conducted with a small number of project schools. Results indicated that all stakeholder groups have positive attitudes and beliefs regarding the values and importance of parent involvement in Chapter 1 project planning and implementation. There was, however, a relatively low level of involvement in the instructional process in general and in home-based activity in particular. Few significant relationships appeared to exist between parent involvement activities and children's school performance. Where a link was found, it generally related to home-based reinforcement provided by parents. Consistent with other studies, most of the barriers to parent involvement related to lack of time, cultural differences, language barriers, and inappropriate attitudes (in this case, the negative attitudes of teenage students). Results also indicated that a sincere and caring attitude on the part of school staff, personal contacts with parents, and meaningful activities to engage parents tended to increase parent involvement. Several recommendations for Chapter 1 programs were drawn from the results, including: (1) increase home-based parent activities to reinforce student learning; (2) develop programs to raise parents' literacy skills; (3) solicit input from parents in planning parent involvement activities; and (4) involve students in promoting family-school partnerships. (Contains 27 references and 8 tables.) (HTH)

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In Search of the Elusive Magic Bullet: Parent Involvement and Student Outcomes

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In Search of the Elusive Magic Bullet: Parent Involvement and Student Outcomes

I. Background

Parent involvement in education has been the focus of much research attention. While it is generally accepted that parent involvement has a desirable effect on student achievement, there is little agreement on how it may best be implemented. Evidently, it is seldom implemented in a way that is satisfactory to all stake-holder groups (e.g., students, parents, teachers and school administrators).

This paradox stems in part from the fact that parent involvement comprises a wide range of processes, events and conditions. In addition, stake-holder groups entertain a diversity of goals, ranging from improved student achievement to increased community support for schools. Their varied perspectives produce different beliefs about what forms of parent involvement are most helpful in achieving the respective goals.

Positive Evidence

Intuitively, there seems little doubt that parents play a critical role in their children's cognitive development and school achievement (Scott-Jones, 1984). There is, in fact, an abundance of evidence that parent involvement can have a positive impact on the process and outcomes of schooling (Edmonds, 1979; Walberg, 1984). McLaughlin and Shields (1986), for example, reported that parents can contribute to improved student achievement through their involvement in (a) the selection of appropriate reading materials, (b) targeting educational services, and (c) the use of particular pedagogical strategies. Clark (1983) found a correlation between achievement in reading and mathematics and the number of books at home. The National Institute of Education (1985) has identified other home-based achievement correlates: (a) providing a regular place and specific times for school work, (b) providing access to libraries and museums, and (c) availability of parents themselves as educational resources.

Becher (1984) found that reading to children enhances their receptive and expressive vocabularies as well as literal and inferential comprehension skills. According to the author, the act of reading to the child establishes reading as a valued activity, develops shared topics of interest, and promotes interaction among family members. Similarly, Sider and Sledjeski (1978) found that parents who read for their own enjoyment model reading as a valued activity and their children have more positive attitudes toward reading and school achievement.

Implementation Dilemma

It is generally recognized that compensatory education programs are among the most difficult to implement. One of the primary reasons is undoubtedly the requirement of parent involvement. For many programs, it is difficult enough to accomplish parent consultation, often a federal requirement, in the most perfunctory manner, let alone making such involvement meaningful and effective in fostering student achievement.

Research suggests that parents can help most effectively in providing home reinforcement of school learning by supplementing school work at home, and monitoring and encouraging their children's learning (Armor, et al., 1976; Brandt, 1979; Weilby, 1979; Melargo, et al., 1981; Sinclair, 1981; Walberg, 1984). However, this aspect of parent involvement is seldom emphasized in Chapter 1 projects. Even though parent and community involvement was recognized as one of the primary attributes most responsible

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for program impact, a recent study (Griswold, et al., 1986) identified the least popular parent involvement activities to be monitoring homework, providing input on homework and stimulating discussions at home. Much more popular were parent committees, parent-teacher meetings and workshops on parent involvement.

Most parent involvement activities are only tangentially, if at all, related to children's cognitive development and school achievement. It is not surprising that to many school people, the impact of parent involvement on children's school achievement has largely been unclear (Paddock, 1979; Fullan, 1982). Quite often, one hears contrasting opinions of Chapter 1 teachers about the benefits of parent involvement. Although many teachers believe that parent involvement is important, they are either uncomfortable developing such programs or are skeptical of their success (Epstein and Becker, 1982).

Generating teacher interest and disseminating effective parent involvement models have been difficult challenges for educators. Epstein (1987), for example, notes:

> *"Even those educators convinced of the value of parental involvement are often strapped for creative and effective mechanisms to foster meaningful participation. This need is most acute in rural areas where myriad cultural, educational and logistical obstacles often undermine the plans of committed teachers and administrators." (p. 41)*

The author further suggests that teachers need "credible, specific information about the value of parent involvement activities, clear expectations from opinion leaders, and detailed, believable descriptions of successful practices." There is a mutually supportive relationship between belief in the effectiveness of parent involvement and its use: teachers who are convinced of its effectiveness, use it; those who use it, in turn, tend to be convinced of its effectiveness.

Typologies

Various conceptual frameworks have been used in parent involvement research. McLaughlin and Shields (1986), for example, conceptualize parent involvement activities in two categories: advisory and collaborative. Advisory activities promote involvement through formal mechanisms (e.g., parent advisory councils). In collaborative activities, parents assume the role of partners in their child's education. Epstein identified five types of parent involvement (Brandt, 1989):

1. Parents' basic obligations include ensuring children's health and safety, practicing effective parenting skills to prepare children for school, and providing good home conditions to support school work.

2. Schools have the basic obligations of communicating with parents on student progress and school programs through such means as notices, report cards, letters, phone calls and conferences.

3. Parents can participate in school activities by serving as volunteers at student performances and sports events as well as attending parent workshops and other training activities.

4. Parents can play an active role in their child's learning activities at home.

5. Parents can serve as decision makers and advocates through such organizations as parent-teacher associations, advisory councils, school boards at the local and state level.

In general, parents can play symbolic as well as instrumental roles in improving their child's education. Symbolic roles (e.g., serving as advisors and advocates) allow parents to galvanize community support for school programs thereby enhancing the chances for a successful implementation of such programs. Instrumental roles require parents to be involved directly in the instructional process, serving as a vital resource in their child's education. While symbolic roles are necessary and perhaps even essential to the success of school programs, it is the instrumental roles that have a direct bearing on the child's school performance.

Obstacles and Facilitators

Regardless of what roles parents may play to enhance their child's education, it appears necessary for educators to be fully aware of conditions that facilitate or impede parent involvement in education. A review of the relevant research and our experience suggest that a wide range of conditions can impede or facilitate parent involvement. Some of these conditions are discussed below.

Obstacles

Narrow conceptualization. Teachers and administrators of compensatory education programs often view parent involvement only in terms of attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other formal meetings. This narrow conceptualization is partly due to a mechanistic interpretation of earlier federal mandates for parent involvement. For example, in the early years of Title I, Chapter 1's predecessor, oversight functions for parent groups were primarily interpreted as attempts to avoid abuse of program resources and to ensure community support for the program. The interpretation emphasized the role of parents as decision-makers and advocates. Little attention was paid to the role of parents as active partners (with school) in the child's education.

Inappropriate attitudes. There is a tendency for school administrators and teachers to undervalue parent involvement, particularly involvement from working class or non-traditional families. Teachers may have different expectations of parents based on class or cultural differences. For example, they often see single parents as less responsible for their child's education when these parents actually spend more time with their child on learning activities at home than married parents (Epstein, 1985). Some teachers believe that low-income parents will not or cannot participate in the child's school work, or that their participation will not be beneficial (Epstein, 1983). There is in fact evidence that teachers tend to initiate contact with upper middle class parents more often (than lower class parents) and for a wider variety of reasons (Mager, 1980).

Lack of teacher preparation. Historically, parent involvement as an integral part of the educational process has received little or no attention in teacher training programs. As a result, teachers are often uncertain about how to involve parents in school or instructional activities. In some cases, allowing parent involvement is seen as relinquishing teachers' role as experts on educational matters. When parents are involved in classroom activities (e.g., serving as aides), teachers are concerned that the parents (a) will not follow instructions, (b) may not know how to work with children, and (c) may not keep their commitments (Powell, 1980).

Parent occupational limitations. Parents' occupations may limit their availability for

involvement activities. Their work schedules may make it difficult or impossible to attend meetings or to serve as a volunteer. Low wages may force parents to work more than one job, limiting their availability to be involved in learning activities at home. Limited financial resources may reduce their ability to create a supportive home environment or to provide materials which their child needs to be successful in school.

Cultural characteristics. The home culture can, in some cases, deter parent involvement. For example, the home culture may differ from the school culture, making effective school-home communication difficult. The parents' culture may hold educational institutions in such high regard that it is not considered appropriate for parents to interact with educators or raise questions about school events. As a result, parents may be reluctant to initiate contact with school, perceiving such activities as questioning the decisions or actions of experts.

Facilitators

Use of innovative techniques. To facilitate parent involvement, information about school should be provided to parents at a convenient time and in a convenient manner. To accomplish this, schools may consider the use of audio recordings, videotapes, computerized phone messages and cable television (Brandt, 1989). In addition, teachers may provide parents with specific activities which they can do with their child at home. Calendars with home instruction activities can be developed in accordance with the school curriculum. For example, if the child is studying nutrition, the parent may take the child to the grocery store to examine nutrition labels on food packages (Smith, 1986).

Dissemination of effective practices. As Epstein (1987) pointed out, educators are often strapped for creative and effective mechanisms to foster meaningful parent participation. Detailed, believable descriptions of successful practices will greatly facilitate the adoption and implementation of such practices by teachers and school administrators.

Home-based strategies. McLaughlin and Shield (1986) have found that school-based parent involvement strategies have limited value for low-income parents. On the other hand, strategies which move the site of interaction to the home seem to yield positive outcomes for students, parents and teachers. Home-based strategies work for low-income parents because the interaction takes place on parents' home turf. Such strategies allow them to focus on their own child, build their skills and confidence as parents, and accommodate their work schedule.

Clearly, a major challenge facing the education community is to identify effective parent involvement practices which can be adopted by parents, teachers and school administrators. Identification of practices directly related to student achievement would be particularly helpful. Research suggests that many school-based approaches used in the past have limited effects for low-income families whereas home-based activities seem to result in improved student achievement. A comparison of home-based strategies with one another and with other approaches in terms of their respective impact on student achievement can provide useful information for the improvement of compensatory education programs.

II. Chapter 1 Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has been a congressionally mandated component of the Chapter 1 (formerly Title I) program since its inception. During the past 26 years, requirements for

parent involvement have changed, but some form of parent consultation has always been a crucial part of Chapter 1 programs. Indeed, parent involvement has served as a means of ensuring that high quality instructional services are provided to educationally disadvantaged students participating in Chapter 1 programs. Current Chapter 1 legislation (i.e., P.L. 100-297, the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments) continues to place great emphasis on parent involvement as a means of maintaining and improving educational services to disadvantaged children.

Chapter 1 parent involvement can occur at three levels:

- Advocacy
- Decision making
- Instruction

The advocacy role is generally fulfilled by national parent organizations and other interest groups dedicated to the protection and furtherance of equal access to quality education for disadvantaged children. That these groups and organizations have been effective in promoting Chapter 1 interest is amply evidenced by the fact that the program, after 25 years of congressional support, has become the largest federally funded compensatory education program in the country. The funding level has steadily increased during the past two decades and the program is widely perceived to be working and working well. Naturally, the national advocacy groups draw a great deal of support and nurturance from local grass-roots organizations such as parent advisory councils at the school and district levels.

At the decision-making level, parents, individually or as an organized group, provide input in program design, implementation, evaluation and program improvement. This function is generally carried out through the parent advisory councils at the school or district level. At this level, parents' decision-making power can be symbolic or instrumental. Symbolic power is exercised when a parent group approves or signs off Chapter 1 related plans and documents (e.g., project applications) without providing any substantive input in the decision-making process. Instrumental power is exercised when parents, through meaningful consultation, provide substantive input in the decision-making process. Through the various organized parent groups, this level of parental involvement has generally allowed parents to have a say, symbolically or instrumentally, in how Chapter 1 services are planned and how such services are provided to program participants.

At the instructional level, parent involvement can exert the most potent influence on student achievement. Parents are their children's first teachers and the primary, if not the only, providers of educational experiences to children before they enter formal schooling. They continue to be a key factor in fostering high achievement at elementary and secondary grades. First person examples of parental involvement at this level include:

- I read to my child.
- I encourage my child to read to me.
- I visit the library with my child.
- I provide books in my home.
- I keep myself aware of my child's reading problem.
- I provide a quiet place for my child to study.
- I set aside a specific time for my child to study.
- I help my child to do his/her homework when necessary.
- I turn off the TV when my child is studying or reading.

Notwithstanding the abundance of potentially beneficial activities, it is at this level that

parent involvement is the most tenuous. It is the most important, yet the weakest, link in the chain of school-home partnership.

In the Honolulu School District, the overall goal of Chapter 1 parent involvement is to create a working partnership between home and school in the education of disadvantaged children. Success in this partnership requires that parents accept responsibility to provide educational experiences for their children and that school personnel assist parents to become functioning partners in the educational process. District policy requires that parents of Chapter 1 students have adequate opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of the program, including needs assessment, program objectives, instructional activities and program evaluation. Specifically, Chapter 1 parents are given the opportunity to engage in the following activities:

- Participate in program planning and implementation
- Visit and observe Chapter 1 projects
- Participate in parent-teacher conference
- Attend School Parent Advisory Committee meetings and workshops
- Attend District Parent Advisory Council meetings and workshops
- Tutor own child
- Respond to Chapter 1 needs assessment questionnaire

To promote parent involvement, each School Parent Advisory Committee (SPAC) publishes a newsletter on a regular basis as a means of disseminating Chapter 1 program information to parents. As required by federal regulations, the district, in consultation with parents, conducts an annual assessment of the effectiveness of the parent involvement and determines what action, if any, needs to be taken to increase parent participation.

III. Purpose of the Study

The Honolulu School District offers Chapter 1 services at 21 elementary and secondary schools in the district. A School Parent Advisory Committee (SPAC) is formed at each project school to promote parent involvement. In addition, there is a District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) which provides input on a districtwide basis in Chapter 1 program development and implementation.

The primary purpose of this study is to identify specific parent involvement practices that contribute to positive outcomes of Chapter 1 projects. Although informal assessments have been made over the years, a formal study will systematically validate exemplary practices that may be replicated by less successful projects in the district. Research findings will be used to develop and/or modify current program improvement plans to maximize positive outcomes in all projects.

Ultimately, the purpose of parental involvement is to improve student achievement. In making this purpose the underlying premise of the present study, we are mindful of the fact that parent involvement could have considerable value (e.g., galvanizing community support) that may not directly accrue to student performance. Our primary interest is in identifying and, to the extent feasible, explaining the relationships between parent involvement practices and student outcomes.

IV. Research Design

The study included an extensive review of the extant research on parent involvement. The research base was used in identifying variables of interest, in formulating pertinent research questions and in developing various instruments needed in carrying out the study.

Survey research methodology was a key ingredient in the research design. To assess participant perceptions, questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted with the key stakeholder groups, including Chapter 1 project staff, students and parents.

To reduce costs and data collection burden, stratified random sampling, using grade span as the stratification factor, was used to obtain representative samples of project schools, students and their parents.

To take an in-depth look at exemplary practices, case studies were conducted with a small number of project schools. These case studies were intended to provide a detailed description of effective practices and to create a basis for explaining the relationships between parent involvement and program outcomes.

Research Questions

The study was focused on four general research questions:

1. What is the general strength of the relationships, if any, between parent involvement activities and student outcomes in Chapter 1 projects?

2. What specific parent involvement activities, if any, seem most potent as variables contributing to student achievement?

3. What are some effective ways of promoting such potent parent involvement activities in Chapter 1 projects?

4. What are some of the factors which facilitate or impede parent involvement?

The first two research questions were addressed by means of correlational analyses of survey data on parent involvement process variables and student outcome variables. The last two questions were the focus of in-depth onsite case studies.

Process Variables

Parent involvement activities implemented by the Honolulu School District included:

- Participate in planning and implementing Chapter 1 projects.
- Visit/observe Chapter 1 projects.
- Participate in parent-teacher conferences.
- Attend school PAC meetings and workshops.
- Attend district PAC meetings and workshops.
- Tutor own child.
- Respond to needs assessment questionnaire.

To afford a more in-depth analysis of parent involvement activities at the instructional level, the study also included, as variables affecting student outcomes, such home-based activities as:

- Reading to child
- Encouraging child to read
- Visiting the library with child
- Providing books at home
- Keeping aware of child's reading problem
- Providing a place for child to study
- Setting aside a specific time for child to study
- Helping child to do his/her homework when necessary

Outcome Variables

The study included the following measures of student achievement:

- Average reading achievement in normal curve equivalents (NCEs)
- School attendance
- School grades in reading and language arts

These variables were selected partly because they were widely used measures of success for Chapter 1 projects and the pertinent data were generally available from project documents.

V. Instrument Development

A search for existing measures helped identify instruments which might be adopted or adapted for use in the study. For example, to assess process variables, the Parent Involvement Record, an existing measure, was adopted to obtain data on schoolwide parent involvement activities. In addition, parent and student survey questionnaires were created to assess parent involvement in the instructional process. The survey items were developed on the basis of the review of research on parent involvement as well as our extensive experience with Chapter 1 and other compensatory education projects. Such relevant factors as family income, language background and ethnicity were also included in the survey instruments. A teacher questionnaire was developed to obtain staff perceptions with respect to factors which facilitate or impede parent involvement.

For the case studies, field work plan and site visit protocols were developed to identify school sites for the studies and to prepare the research team to conduct the field work. In addition, an interview guide was created for use with key informants at each of the selected school sites. Key informants included project staff at the school and district levels, school administrators, parents and students.

Specific criteria and procedures were developed for identifying the case study sites. These criteria and procedures were specified after a careful review of project documents as well as pertinent information on process and outcome variables. For example, only projects with high achievement gains and a high level of parent involvement were included as case study sites.

All instruments and research procedures were field tested at two elementary schools identified by the district staff. The results of the field test were used to revise and refine

the instruments and research procedures.

VI. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted as a joint effort between the project staff and the external research team. A major portion of data collection activities was performed by the school and/or district-level staff. This included gathering student outcome data (e.g., NCE data, attendance, school grades) from school and project files. The data were recorded on data summary sheets according to specifications developed by the research team.

Questionnaire surveys were conducted with a random sample of ten Chapter 1 schools, stratified to include elementary, intermediate and high schools. The sample schools included six elementary schools, two intermediate schools, and two high schools. Within each identified school, Chapter 1 classes were used as the primary sampling units to facilitate the conduct of the questionnaire surveys and other data collection activities. Survey data were collected from a matched sample of 328 students and their parents and 80 teachers.

All case studies were conducted by a local research team. Field work included extensive document reviews, interviews with key informants and onsite observations. The case study sites included three elementary schools, two intermediate schools, and one high school.

VII. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted at the student and school levels. The school-level analysis included an extensive review of project documents and an examination of schoolwide activities reported in the Parent Involvement Record. The student-level analysis included data from the questionnaire survey to determine, among other things, the extent of parent involvement in the instructional process and its relationships with the student outcome measures.

In addition to descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between parent involvement activities and student outcomes.

The case studies provided an opportunity to take an in-depth look at parent involvement practices at each exemplary project site. Data obtained from each site were content analyzed to identify trends and patterns of parent involvement practices. While each case study was descriptive, a cross-site analysis was performed to recognize matching patterns and common themes relating to parent involvement and student achievement (Yin, 1990).

VIII. Findings

Student Survey

Student Characteristics

The student sample consisted of 328 elementary and secondary students in grades three through nine. The students came from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, with the majority being Asian or Pacific Islanders. Close to one-half of the students were from families with an annual income of $20,000 or less. About 30 percent of the families reported an annual income of more than $30,000. More than one-half of the students spoke only English at home. Close to one-fourth spoke English and another language at home. Approximately one-fifth spoke a language other than English at home.

Home-Based Activity

The student survey results (summarized in Table 1) suggest that there was a moderate amount of home-based parent involvement activity. Among other things, the data show that:

- Slightly more than one-third (33.9%) of the students reported that their parents never read to them.
- More than one-fifth (21%) said they were never encouraged to read to their parents.
- One-half indicated that their parents never visited the library with them.

Table 1

Percent of Students Reporting Home-Based Parent Involvement Activities (N = 328)

Activity	Extent of Involvement Never	Sometimes	Always
My parent reads to me.	33.9	57.9	8.2
My parent encourages me to read to him/her.	21.0	50.6	28.3
My parent visits the library with me.	50.0	42.4	7.6
My parent encourages me to use the library.	21.0	41.4	37.6
My parent provides books in my home.	9.9	35.8	54.3
My parent keeps track of my progress in school work.	4.4	32.7	62.9
My parent makes sure that there is a place for me to study at home.	10.4	32.0	57.6
My parent sets aside a specific time for me to study at home.	22.2	42.5	35.2
My parent helps me with my homework when necessary.	11.7	43.2	45.1
My parent cares about what we do in my Chapter 1 class.	6.7	39.4	54.0
My parent cares about what happens at my school.	3.8	28.5	67.7
My parent knows what we do in Chapter 1.	15.5	52.8	31.6

Parent Survey

Home-Based Activity

Like their children, the parents reported a moderate amount of home-based parent involvement activity (See Table 2). Few parents indicated that they read to their children or visited the library with them regularly. About one-fifth (20.5%) never read to their children and more than one-third (36%) never visited the library with them.

Table 2

Percent of Parents Reporting Home-Based Parent Involvement Activities (N = 328)

Activity	Extent of Involvement		
	Never	Sometimes	Always
I read to my child.	20.5	73.4	6.1
I encourage my child to read to me.	10.3	55.3	34.4
I visit the library with my child.	36.0	57.9	6.1
I encourage my child to use the library.	6.5	48.4	45.2
I provide books in my home.	4.5	30.1	65.4
I keep myself aware of my child's reading or other school problems.	3.9	32.3	63.9
I provide a place for my child to study.	2.2	28.5	69.2
I set aside a specific time for my child to study.	8.4	36.4	55.2
I help my child with his/her homework when necessary.	4.2	40.1	55.8
I make sure that my child has school supplies.	.3	8.7	91.0
I expect my child to do well in school.	0.0	12.6	87.4

Meaningfulness of Activities

Generally, the parents provided favorable ratings on the meaningfulness of activities. A large majority (70%) indicated that the following two activities were particularly meaningful:

- Participate in parent-teacher conferences.
- Tutor my child.

Less meaningful activities included:

- Attend School Parent Advisory Committee meetings.
- Attend School Parent Advisory Committee workshops.
- Attend District Parent Advisory Council meetings.
- Attend District Parent Advisory Council workshops.

As shown in Table 3, only slightly more than one-third (from 33.6% to 38.3%) of the parents rated these activities as very meaningful.

Table 3

Parent Perceptions on Meaningfulness of Parent Involvement Activities (N = 328)

Activity	Not Meaning-ful	Somewhat Meaning-ful	Very Meaning-ful
Participate in planning this Chapter 1 project.	2.3	43.9	53.8
Participate in implementing this Chapter 1 project.	7.6	42.4	50.0
Visit Chapter 1 projects.	5.7	45.3	49.0
Observe Chapter 1 projects.	6.1	41.6	52.3
Participate in parent-teacher conferences.	5.6	24.1	70.3
Attend School Parent Advisory Committee meetings.	10.8	51.7	37.5
Attend School Parent Advisory Committee workshops.	8.4	53.2	38.3
Attend District Parent Advisory Council meetings.	19.2	47.2	33.6
Attend District Parent Advisory Council workshops.	15.9	48.4	35.7
Tutor my child.	4.0	25.1	70.9
Respond to needs assessment questionnaires.	3.2	39.3	57.5

Note: Figures in Table are percentages of parents providing the respective ratings.

Barriers and Facilitators

The survey results revealed few barriers to parent involvement. In virtually all cases, the parents indicated the presence of facilitating conditions. For example, a large majority (67.2% and 72.3%) reported that:

- Chapter 1 teachers make it easy for parents to get information about the project.
- Chapter 1 staff feel that parent involvement is important.

Perhaps most significantly, a predominant majority (87.8%) believed that they can help their child do better at school by doing things with him or her at home.

The survey results show that a major barrier to involvement was time constraints. As shown in Table 4, more than one-half (57.5%) of the parents indicated that it was difficult to find time to get involved with Chapter 1 activities.

As one parent put it:

> *"I have two jobs and most things that take place are not on weekends. So I don't attend."*

Another parent said:

> *"I believe in this program and staff. I only wish as a parent that I could be available at all times. But unfortunately I'm not."*

Table 4

Parent Perceptions on Conditions Affecting Parent Involvement (N = 328)

Condition	No	Not Sure	Yes
My child's school provides many ways for me to get involved with school activities.	6.8	29.7	63.5
My child's Chapter 1 project provides many ways for me to get involved with Chapter 1 activities.	8.8	26.7	64.5
The Chapter 1 project staff feel that my involvement with Chapter 1 is important.	4.1	23.6	72.3
The Chapter 1 project staff know how to work with me as a parent.	5.5	32.8	61.8
It is difficult for me to find time to get involved with Chapter 1 activities.	21.8	20.7	57.5
I can discuss my child with the Chapter 1 project staff.	7.8	28.8	63.4
My child's Chapter 1 teachers make it easy for me to get information about the project.	6.4	26.4	67.2
My child's Chapter 1 teachers tell me about things that I can do with my child at home.	13.0	26.6	60.4
I can help my child do better at school by doing things with him/her at home.	3.7	8.5	87.8

Note: Figures in Table are percentages of parents responding with "Yes," "No," or "Not sure."

Teacher Survey

The teacher sample consisted of 80 elementary and secondary teachers in grades three through nine. Approximately one-half of the teachers taught multiple grade levels.

Helpfulness of Activities

The teachers provided very favorable ratings on the helpfulness of the various parent involvement activities. A large majority provided ratings of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale on the following activities:

- Participate in parent-teacher conferences (82.9%)
- Attend School Parent Advisory Committee meetings and workshops (83.1)
- Tutor own child (79.4%)

Table 5 presents a summary of teacher perceptions on the helpfulness of parent involvement activities.

Table 5

Teacher Perceptions on Helpfulness of Parent Involvement Activities (N = 80)

Activity	Not at All Helpful				Very Helpful
	1	2	3	4	5
Participate in planning and implementing Chapter 1 projects.	1.6	3.2	29.0	30.6	35.5
Visit/observe Chapter 1 projects.	2.9	4.4	20.6	35.3	36.8
Participate in parent-teacher conferences.	0.0	2.6	14.5	23.7	59.2
Attend School Parent Advisory Committee meetings and workshops.	1.4	1.4	14.1	32.4	50.7
Attend District Parent Advisory Council meetings and workshops.	0.0	3.7	22.2	31.5	42.6
Tutor own child.	4.4	2.9	13.2	19.1	60.3
Respond to needs assessment questionnaires.	0.0	1.4	22.9	38.6	37.1

Note: Figures in Table are percentages of teachers providing the respective ratings.

Teacher Attitude

The teachers showed a highly positive attitude towards conditions which can facilitate or impede parent involvement. For example:

- Virtually all (98.8%) of the teachers indicated that Chapter 1 staff valued parent involvement with project activities.
- A predominant majority (87.5%) reported that Chapter 1 staff made it easy for parents to get information about the project.
- A predominant majority (95.1%) believed that parents can help their children do better at school by doing things with them at home.

Further, a large majority (from 66.2% to 87.5%) of the teachers indicated that:

- Parent involvement should go beyond parent-teacher conferences and other formal meetings.
- Single parents are as responsible for their children's education as other parents.
- Low-income parents do help their children with school work.

Table 6 presents a summary of teacher perceptions on conditions affecting parent involvement.

Table 6

Teacher Perceptions on Conditions Affecting Parent Involvement (N = 80)

Condition	Not at All True 1	2	3	4	True in All Cases 5
My school provides many ways for parents to get involved with school activities.	1.4	4.2	31.0	29.6	33.8
My Chapter 1 project provides many ways for parents to get involved.	0.0	1.3	7.7	39.7	51.3
Our Chapter 1 staff value parent involvement with Chapter 1 project activities.	0.0	0.0	1.3	17.5	81.3
Our Chapter 1 staff know how to work with parents.	0.0	0.0	6.5	49.6	44.2
It is difficult for parents to find time to get involved with Chapter 1 activities.	3.8	3.8	23.1	42.3	26.9
Parents do not feel comfortable telling the Chapter 1 staff what they should do with their children.	5.1	5.1	50.8	35.6	3.4
Our Chapter 1 staff make it easy for parents to get information about the Chapter 1 project.	0.0	1.3	11.3	27.5	60.0
Our Chapter 1 teachers tell parents about things that they can do with their child at home.	0.0	0.0	16.9	37.7	45.5

Note: Figures in Table are percentages of teachers providing the respective ratings.

Table 6 (Continued)

Teacher Perceptions on Conditions Affecting Parent Involvement (N = 80)

Condition	Not at All True 1	2	3	4	True in All Cases 5
Parents can help their children do better at school by doing things with them at home.	2.5	1.3	1.3	13.8	81.3
Parent involvement should be limited to parent-teacher conferences and other formal meetings.	69.3	14.7	10.7	5.3	0.0
Single parents are less responsible for their children's education.	66.7	20.8	11.1	1.4	0.0
Low-income parents do not help their children with school work.	40.8	25.4	26.8	5.6	1.4
Our Chapter 1 staff have received training in how to work with parents.	12.1	21.2	33.3	16.7	16.7
Our Chapter 1 staff are provided with information on successful parent involvement practices.	2.9	15.7	30.0	30.0	21.4

Note: Figures in Table are percentages of teachers providing the respective ratings.

In open-ended comments, the teachers identified the following as potential barriers to parent involvement:

- Language barrier is an obstacle to parent involvement. Many parents feel inhibited because they are non-proficient in English.
- Many parents have two jobs; their work schedule makes involvement difficult.
- For the immigrant population, it is culturally inappropriate to tell educators how to do their job.

- Many parents can't help because they lack the ability. They would be willing to tutor their own child if they knew how.

Improvement Suggestions

The teachers provided the following suggestions for improving parent involvement:

1. Conduct activities at different times of the day to accommodate parents' schedules.
2. Obtain parent input in planning activities.
3. Provide expert training in how to involve parents.
4. Provide more outside activities to improve relationships among parents, students and teachers.

Student Outcome Data

Student outcome data were obtained from program documents maintained at the school sites or the district office, including Chapter 1 annual evaluations (e.g., NCE scores) and student records maintained at the school sites (e.g., attendance and GPAs). These data, obtained for a sample of 328 students, are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

Student Outcome Measures (N = 328)

Measure	Mean	S.D.
1991 spring NCE*	32.7	10.5
1991 fall NCE	24.1	9.3
1992 spring NCE	34.3	12.4
1991-92 GPA**	4.1	6.3
1991-92 Attendance***	7.5	11.2

*Based on Metropolitan Achievement Test (Reading Comprehension)

**Based on a five-point scale as follows:

5 = A or E (Excellent)
4 = B or S+ (Satisfactory plus)
3 = C or S
2 = D or S-
1 = F or N (Not Satisfactory)

The grade point averages were for language arts/English.

***Average number of days absent.

Note: The large standard deviations (S.D.s) for GPAs and attendance suggest great variation among the students with respect to their GPAs and attendance.

The NCE data reflect a performance pattern consistent with the national trend, with a relatively large gain from fall to spring and a gain of much smaller magnitude from spring to spring. The other data provide a generally positive picture of performance in the regular program as measured by GPAs in language arts or English as well as school attendance.

Achievement Correlates

Several significant relationships were found between student outcomes and parent involvement activities as reported by students and parents. Significant correlations are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Relationships between Parent Involvement Activities and Student Outcomes (N = 328)

Parent Involvement Activity	Student Outcome	Correlation
My parent cares about what we do in my Chapter 1 class.	1991 spring NCE	r = .28**
	1992 spring NCE	r = .25**
My parent encourages me to read.	1992 spring NCE	r = .22*
My parent keeps track of my progress in school work.	1991 spring NCE	r = .26**
My parent makes sure that there is a place for me to study at home.	1991 spring NCE	r = .22*

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

The relationship between parent encouragement to read (as reported by students) and NCE scores is also supported by a significant correlation ($r = .24$, $p < .01$) between parent report of encouragement ("I encourage my child to read to me.") and the 1991 spring NCE scores.

The correlational analysis also found a significant relationship ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$) between home language and attendance. This correlation is interesting because the negative coefficient seems to suggest that the more English is a home language for the students, the greater their absenteeism, even though the relationship is relatively weak. Perhaps immigrant children who speak another language at home are less likely to be absent from school.

Several characteristics of the achievement correlates summarized in Table 8 are noteworthy:

First, there is a conspicuous absence of any relationships between parent involvement activities (as reported by students or parents) and such achievement measures as GPA in language arts and school attendance.

Second, virtually all significant relationships are found between parent involvement activities which provide home-based reinforcement to students and student outcomes.

Third, while the correlations are statistically significant, the relationships are relatively weak, accounting for a relatively small amount of the achievement variance.

Case Studies

Case Study Sites

The case studies were conducted at three elementary schools, two intermediate schools, and one high school. These schools were selected as case study sites because of their exemplary parent involvement practices. While all the schools had sufficient concentrations of low-income families to qualify them for Chapter 1 support, they varied with respect to geographical locations as well as socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds -- factors which have a direct bearing on the level and nature of parent involvement with education.

Extensive field work was conducted at the case study sites in the spring of 1993. The research team interviewed principals, project staff, parents and students at each of the case study sites. In addition, the researchers observed classroom and parent activities. The following sections present research findings on common themes which cut across the exemplary practices.

Facilitators

Positive philosophy. At each of the case study sites, the principal sets the tone for creating a school climate where self-esteem and acceptance of each individual are the norm. Staff members help develop self-esteem among the parents and students.

Students receive recognition not only for academic improvement but also for school service, citizenship, social behavior, creativity and active participation in involving parents in their respective Chapter 1 projects. Recognition takes a variety of forms, including certificates, prizes, books or being featured in newsletters and bulletins. Parents also receive recognition in school publications for their contributions.

Administrative support. Each case study school has a strong administrator who clearly demonstrates commitment and support for the Chapter I program. Some principals actively participate in parent activities, others show support by their attendance at meetings. At one school, for example, the principal, vice-principal and other staff members help prepare dinners for parent meetings. At another school, the principal, along with the librarian and other regular classroom teachers, demonstrate story-telling to parents.

While their styles and methods differ, the administrators' support makes a positive impact on the parent involvement program. When principals involve the total school staff in the acceptance of the Chapter I program, regular staff members also participate in parent involvement activities.

Strong project leadership. Another common element of these projects is a strong project teacher who establishes an effective working relationship and good rapport with the regular school staff as well as parents and students. Goals, objectives, and expectations are made clear to students and parents. Each uses his or her expertise in curriculum and instruction to train the project staff and parents to help children in school and at home. Under the leadership of the project teacher, the regular as well as Chapter 1 staff give of their time beyond regular school hours to call parents and attend meetings even during the summer.

Meaningful activity. Parent activities are planned with the needs of children and parents in mind. The project staff use information from the needs assessment, parent evaluations, and their knowledge of students and parents to develop meaningful activities for parents. Hands-on activities where parents and children work together are among the most successful. Another effective strategy is the use of small groups to promote interaction among teachers, parents and students. Teachers are able to share information regarding school requirements and expectations, provide information about available school services, and address concerns of parents on a more personal and informal basis.

In some schools, parents are welcome to visit and observe the classes. At one school, parents have the opportunity of attending their children's classes. At two other schools, parents may "drop in" any time. At another school, parents participate in weekly coffee hours.

Flexible meeting schedules. Parent meetings are scheduled both in the evenings and during school hours. In most cases, evening meetings are held to accommodate working parents. Adults attending meetings are often members of extended families, including grandmothers and aunts.

Sensitivity to changing family structure. As one principal observes, it is imperative that the school staff know their clientele. Each of the case study schools in its own way has used this philosophy to find suitable ways to reach its parents. In each of the schools, factors relating to the changing family structure and society in general are considered in planning parent involvement programs. Examples include:

- The wide range of family models (e.g., extended families, working parents, single parents, unwed parents)
- Diversity of communities (e.g., low cost housing neighborhoods, isolated neighborhoods where families often live with no contact with others)
- Diversity of family backgrounds (educational attainment, socioeconomic status)

Personal contacts. Personal contacts and open communication are important components in each program. General communication on parent activities through newsletters, flyers and memos are followed up with phone calls. Various incentives (e.g., books, points and "goodies") are used to motivate students to promptly return responses from parents and to have parents attend meetings.

Personal phone calls are appreciated by parents and result in greater participation. Working parents who are unable to attend meetings regularly are especially grateful for the phone calls. Student awareness of personal communications between teachers and parents helps improve motivation and behavior in the classroom.

At one intermediate school, teachers call each parent to establish a home-school working relationship at the beginning of the school year. They invite parents to visit the school or to call in for information and assistance. At one high school, calls are made by each teacher before a scheduled parent meeting to apprise parents of the agenda and the dinner menu.

Multi-cultural perspective. An awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity helps provide meaningful activities for parents and children. Parents feel a sense of pride in being able to contribute and share some part of their culture, be it food, artifacts, songs, stories or dances. This fosters respect for and appreciation of different cultures and provides opportunities to try new things without stereotyping themselves or others. Acceptance and understanding of different cultures and languages are valued and celebrated. Multiethnic activities result in the largest parent attendance at these schools.

Food plays an important part in increasing parent attendance at meetings. Serving dinners to the entire family encourages more parents to attend. Parents take pride in contributing desserts or ethnic dishes. Other schools serve refreshments prepared by staff or students. Refreshments are provided at regular coffee hours or when parents drop in to visit classrooms.

Student involvement. At each school, students are invited to accompany their parents to meetings. Their involvement in program presentations, food preparation, or serving as interpreters, also helps to increase parent attendance.

Barriers

The case studies identify a range of barriers to effective parent involvement including:

Lack of time. Many parents need to cope with economic realities by having two or three jobs. Work schedules often prevent these parents from attending meetings. The case study schools overcome this barrier by varying meeting times and by notifying parents early enough so they could arrange for time off from work to attend the meetings.

Language barrier. A lack of English proficiency among the diverse immigrant populations who speak English as a second language often hampers communication. The case study schools are using translators from the district office and the community as well as students to alleviate the problem.

Cultural differences. Differences in cultural values also affect parent involvement. In some cultures, parents feel that the school should play the primary role in educating their children. These parents are reluctant to voice their opinions.

Illiteracy. Illiteracy, in immigrant families and among the local population, makes it difficult to get parents to read with their children at home.

Student attitude. Another barrier is the attitude of teenage students who do not wish to have

their parents involved with the school.

Perceived Outcomes

There is anecdotal evidence that when parents are actively involved, students show better attitudes as well as improved academic achievement and behavior. Parents, teachers and students at the case study sites express positive perceptions that parent involvement can be a great influence on student achievement.

IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The present study has provided an abundance of evidence that all stakeholder groups (school staff, parents and students) have positive attitudes and beliefs regarding the value and importance of parent involvement with education. There is generally a high level of involvement with Chapter 1 project planning and implementation. There is, however, a relatively low level of involvement in the instructional process in general and in home-based activity in particular.

Few significant relationships appear to exist between parent involvement activities and children's school performance. Where a link is found, it generally relates to home-based reinforcement provided by parents. It is somewhat ironic that the most meaningful and potent parent involvement activities (in terms of raising student achievement) are those least practiced by parents.

Most of the findings are consistent with what past research has also found. For example, most of the barriers to parent involvement relate to the lack of time on the part of parents, cultural differences, language barrier and inappropriate attitude (in this case, the negative attitude of teenage students). On the other hand, a sincere and caring attitude on the part of school staff, personal contacts, and meaningful activities tend to increase parent involvement. There is evidence that sharing food and involving students in the process are also potent facilitators. Student involvement is particularly critical in a multi-cultural setting where parents may need interpreters or translators to maintain effective communication. Many parents are attracted to school events where they can share their ethnic cuisine.

With respect to the effects of parent involvement on student achievement, a recent review (Wang, et al., 1993) shows that policies at the program, school, district, state, and federal levels have limited effect compared to the day-to-day efforts of the people who are most involved in students' lives. The authors lament that:

> *"Ironically, state, district, and school policies that have received the most attention in the last decade of educational reform appear least influential on learning. Changing such remote policies, even if they are well-intentioned and well-founded, must focus on proximal variables in order to result in improved practices in classrooms and homes, where learning actually takes place."* (Wang, et al., 1993, p. 280)

These and other past findings on the relationship between home-based reinforcement and student performance receive support from the present study.

Recommendations

The study reveals several significant relationships between parent involvement and student performance. While the links do not appear to be very substantial, they are in the expected direction. There is a general perception that parent involvement has served to improve student attitude, behavior and academic achievement. Moreover, parent involvement clearly has its inherent value in educational decisionmaking in a participatory democracy. Given these reasons, it seems appropriate that Chapter 1 programs should continue to involve parents in program planning and implementation. However, a great deal more attention should be focused on parent involvement in the instructional process. For example, more resources should be devoted to the development and promotion of home-based reinforcement activities. The study suggests that school districts can further enhance parent involvement by taking the following steps:

- Promote parent involvement in the instructional process.
- Increase home-based parent activities to reinforce student learning.
- Develop programs to raise literacy skills of parents, particularly among recent immigrant families.
- Solicit and use input from parents in planning parent involvement activities.
- Involve students in promoting family-school partnership.
- Provide training to school staff in parent involvement.

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